Black Feminist Cultural Criticism

Edited by
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In Search of a Discourse and Critique/s that Center the Art of Black Women Artists

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A Critical Call: An Introduction

Black women artists in the USA confront the attitude and practice of negation and marginalization in conventional art history and criticism,1 the cornerstone discourses of the dominant art world Euro-patriarchy.2 However, beyond the hegemonic utterances of art writing3 and art world practice,4 their largely dismissed voices and unexhibited works evince a pervasive presence that intimates the longevity and complexity of their lives, works, and interventions within their diverse contexts.5 The art history and criticism of African-Americanists prioritize the lives and works of African-American men while inscribing women as complements, those of Euro-American feminists center the work and issues of Euro-American women while marginalizing American women of color. Black women artists, in the last decade of the twentieth century, remain semi-muffled, semi-invisible and relatively obscure.6

For Black women artists the contradiction between their material culture and their configurated negation, complementarity and/or marginality in discourses on art constitutes the crisis they consistently resist: one that must be vehemently confronted in the 1990s and beyond if history’s given course is to be altered. A discourse that would prioritize the lives and concerns of Black women artists is urgently needed.
Centering Black Women Artists

Without a discourse of their own, Black women artists remain fixed in the trajectory of displacement, hardly moving beyond the defensive posture of merely responding to their objectification and misrepresentation by others. The severity of this predicament is clearly evident in the agency of protest consistently registered in their voices, a sign of the need not only for a drastic change but also for a specific discourse wherein that change can be seriously initiated...

Dispersed Voices of Resistance and Self-determination

Black women artists on both sides of the Atlantic ocean acknowledge and respond to their historical crises of victimization, defiance, and self-determination. The breadth and depth of their crises are implicated in the unifying character of dissent in their voices and actions. Though this chapter focuses on the USA, Black women artists globally are diachronically and synchronically linked through colonialism, slavery, racism, and capitalism, and in their various countries confront the international transgressive art network that is characterized by Eurocentrism, sexism, elitism, imperialism, and capitalism.

In the USA, American artist/philosopher Adrian Piper challenges what she identifies as the “triple negation” of “Colored Women Artists” in Eurocentric discourses, a problem that she describes as discrimination against them because of their race, gender, and profession (Piper, 1999b: 16). Delineating specific “strategies” that Euro-patriarchists and Euro-feminist/women employ to dismiss the work of “colored women artists,” Piper observes that such art critics and art historians: (1) exoticize/objectify women of color, thus investigating the psychosociological self of the speaker rather than the presumed subject of discussion, which is rendered silent; (2) deflect away from the meaning in the art object by raising “Eurocentric homogeneity” questions of “otherness”; and (3) make generalizations about Black women artists based on “gender and race stereotypes.” Such approaches, rather than describing, interpreting and evaluating concrete works of art or offering art-critical insight, alternatively obscure the subject, thus failing to serve properly either the work under consideration, the audience to whom the critic speaks, or the artist, who is rendered unimportant by the misinterpretation or dismissal of her work.

Overlaying Piper’s critique, New York painter Howardina Pindell challenges the negation and marginalization of all people of color in the dominant art world, particularly in major museums in New York and elsewhere which almost exclusively exhibit works by men of European descent (Pindell, 1989: 32–6). Pindell encourages people of color to work together to open “closed doors”; the visual arts are emphatically not a “white neighborhood”
(Pindell, 1989: 36). Pindell’s activism interpenetrates that of various people of color including the African-American cultural nationalist patriarchy; the different cultural groups operating from their particular ideological positions to counteract art world racism (as well as sexism in the case of feminists) (Failing, 1989: 124–31). For example, Pindell’s critique overlays that of African-Americanist art historian/artist David Driskell (not regarded as a cultural nationalist) which confronts the contradictions in the actions of Eurocentrists who attack Black art exhibitions, supposedly on the basis of their objections to segregated shows and group privilege, while they simultaneously offer “group” privilege of various types to “white males,” including “all white male exhibitions” (Driskell, 1987: 13–15). But though Pindell’s activism, in her various contexts, coalesces with that of Driskell in opposing art world exclusionism, it also diverges from it by underscoring the specific professional problems encountered by Black women artists, thereby concurring more so with Piper’s challenge of the multiple oppressions of Black women artists. The given perspectives and problems articulated by Piper, Pindell, and other Black women artists demonstrate the need for a discourse wherein their work, lives, and other concerns can be critically investigated.

Black women artists in other parts of the African diaspora and Africa engage in similar dialectics. In her catalogue introduction to an exhibition by Black women artists at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London in 1985, British painter Libaina Himid, for example, remarks: “We are claiming what is ours and making ourselves visible. We are eleven of the hundreds of creative Black Women in Britain today. We are here to stay” (quoted in Parker and Pollock, 1990: 67). Do not Himid’s rebellious remarks resemble those of American Blacks, including males such as Driskell who adamantly reaffirm the here-to-stayness of Black artists, their works, and exhibits in the face of racism and sexism? Is it not evident that Black women artists on both sides of the Atlantic utilize resistant speech indicative of a shared determinacy to self-inscribe a visibility that is absent in the dominant art world? And is there any doubt that their oppression and their resistance to it are interrelated?

Moreover, in what other ways beyond speech of resistance do Black women artists register their thoughts and acts of self-determination? One answer to this latter question lies in the character of their work, particularly in their choices of form and subject-matter which often encode specific aesthetic and moral values that resist dominant modernist styles or are beyond dominant tendencies in postmodernist pluralism/s. For example, New York artist Faith Ringgold like most artists produces work with expressive content that represents her individual aesthetic taste, imagination and social interests. Having departed from “conventional” European oil-on-

canvas techniques drawn from African-American women’s skills forming needlework (sewing) and quilting, Ringgold’s so-called “story paintings” provide a complex interpretation of Black art. Such art exhibits displays dynamic and formal qualities of a particular tradition. Ringgold’s work forms syntabulations of multiple-rhythmic forms characteristic of quilting traditions.

In recent years, the knowledge of Black women artists and their contributions to the black arts and culture has expanded and increased. In the realm of the creative spirit, the recognition and study of the range of contributions to the field of visual art by women of color have consisted especially of the work done by the Institute of American Indian Art, Smithsonians Black Archives, and the fine minds of historians such as Walker, Kellum, and Baky. A book such as this is an attempt to reflect a woman’s knowledge of and position in the art world.

Art historians have noted that for centuries, various women were utilized to bring their skills and knowledge to bear on the problem of making the appropriate costume for the period and setting. The work of the women who made the larger costumes and the daily clothing of both men and women are often seen today as a part of South Carolina, Georgia, and the Deep South Canadian history. Though a woman such as Faith Ringgold produced in Boston and New York City and is still finding her place in the collection of the Whitney Museum. Because of her skill as an artist and the respect of the world for her work, she has been able to command her prices as a result of the respect put on her art by those who have discovered her contributions. Ringgold’s story is so good that it could almost be the history of any black female artist in America. Regenia Blue has even written a compelling account of Ringgold’s crafted/
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In this chapter, the author explores various people and cultural practices. The core of the chapter is the discussion of black women artists and their contributions to modern art. The author begins by discussing the historical context, highlighting the role of black women artists in shaping contemporary art movements.

The author points out that black women artists have often been relegated to the margins of the art world, largely because of systemic racism and sexism. These artists have had to navigate a complex terrain to establish themselves as legitimate voices in the art world. The author argues that their work has often been overlooked or undervalued, despite its significant contributions to the art world.

The chapter highlights the work of several black women artists, including Faith Ringgold and Alice Walker. Ringgold, who began her career in the late 1960s, is known for her innovative use of canvas techniques and her emphasis on the intersection of art and everyday life. Walker, a prominent writer and critic, has also been a strong advocate for black women artists and their work.

The author argues that black women artists have been instrumental in challenging traditional notions of what is considered "high art" and "low art." They have shown that art can be both aesthetically pleasing and functional, and that it can be created using a wide range of materials and techniques.

The chapter concludes with a reflection on the importance of recognizing the contributions of black women artists to the art world. The author argues that this recognition is not only important for the artists themselves, but for the broader community as well. By acknowledging the work of black women artists, we can begin to understand the complexity of the art world and the many voices that have contributed to its development.
vitaly inform the aesthetic tastes of many Black and other Americans today, and that there is an obvious connection between them and the so-called “high” or fine arts produced by many African-Americans whose aesthetic judgments are informed by vernacular cultural traditions inherited within families and communities, as well as by judgments introduced and reinforced in lecture halls and studios of institutions where African-Americans and others are socialized to recognize/accept/adopt European-derived canons, many of them reinforced by cultural institutions such as fine art museums or the popular media industry; the former exclude African-American art, the latter manipulate and distort African-American imagery.

That Ringgold dares, as many African-American artists do, to retain or reclaim aesthetic values of African-American traditions, knowing that such qualities will be rejected and/or marginalized by the dominant art establishment, is the most immanent indication of her self-determination. She is often discussed in terms of her feminist ideology, and her work in association with the reclamation of women’s work; thus emphasis is placed on the rebellious character of artist and work alike. However, the employing of material cultural theory situate the art object and better understand its extrinsic values, particularly associated beliefs, perspectives, expressions which can offer deeper insight into the contextual significance of the work (Prown, 1982: 1–18), makes clear that Ringgold and her work are in fact rather conventional though innovative within African-American traditions. Intertextual readings of folk art, fine art, performance, dress, music, sculpture, and folklore among other works reveal the continuum consequent on the inextricable relationship between the “low” and “high” aspects of culture in African-American traditions, a factor fundamental to Ringgold’s production. However, within the context of the dominant art world, which separates folk art from fine art, Ringgold’s work is interpreted as revolutionary, rebellious, political feminist production because it defies form, meaning, technique, aesthetics, and function that are encoded in European-derived canons. Formalist, iconographical, and feminist interpretations limit our understanding of the complexity of Ringgold and her work. Whether she is conventional or rebellious depends on the canon utilized to make that determination. Interpretation of her work in relation to her feminist ideology needs to be expanded with greater depth to substantially consider its intertextual and contextual cultural grounding.

The Ugandan painter Therese Moseke, one of the few known African women artists, utilizes mixed media (dye and ink on canvas) to render her own truth and imagination in subject-matter that might be perceived as catering to a tourist audience: wildlife in Kenya. Despite the controversial nature of the subject-matter, however, she nevertheless continues to paint it, in an expressive style that bears her distinct signature. Her evocative composition, such as her own species, is the most recognizable kind of women in her independence; she doesn’t know what to do. Given the challenge of both, she uses the limited means of the subject-matter.

Also from Africa, the Kalabari’s art traditions is notable for the use of bronze cast and iron, being the subject-matter. She uses herself in her art work, without explicitly showing it traditions. They use symbolic forms of art in the mask and human beings, the formulation of the mask is juxtaposed to the visionistic way of vision; it is a mount in tension, a body that are hidden behind surfaces. The art work imaginations, an unusual quality that is not rare in art work, in fact rare. Yet the art work is visionary that is visionary. Women in the world, unlike the art work is the mother, the female. The “Woman and Child” is one of the prominent themes that give rise to the art work and roles. She uses art work that gives rise to art work and roles. She uses art work that gives rise to art work and roles.
compositions stimulate emotional responses perhaps not too dissimilar from her own special feelings for the wildlife that offers her “almost an inexhaustible kind of subject matter.”

Mosoke has achieved the status of a successful independent artist whose work is her art; i.e. she lives off her work, so to speak. Given her position, however, she does confront the polemical challenge of being “true” to one’s self and the consistent pressure of tourism and the limited exhibition opportunities in Kenya. Her determination to simultaneously strive for individuality and work successfully with popularized subject-matter is an indication of her independence.

Also from Africa (Nigeria), but living in London, Sokari Douglas Camp produces sculpture in metal, a material that within African conventions is restricted to the masculine sphere of production (Blacksmiths, bronzecasters, etc.). Camp’s persistence in working with materials and subject-matter of her choice indicates her self-determination; she has placed herself in an environment where she can freely produce what she chooses without experiencing the limitations imposed on her by Kalabari or other traditions. Drawing heavily on themes of masquerade and associated symbolic forms, colors, textures, and sounds, Camp generally constructs spiritual and human figures and objects in welded metal, utilizing processes of accumulation (and reduction) to achieve the desired effect. These forms are often juxtaposed in display to reconstruct ritual and context. Her style is impressionistic with a characteristic interplay of dynamic mass and voids. Paramount in her structures are rhythmic geometricized and curvilinear designs that are harmoniously enhanced by luminous mono-, bi-, or polychromatic surfaces. Mirrors, feathers, paint, nails, and other details contribute to the imaginative presentment of each figure, which resonates with a dynamic quality that is heightened by kinetics (movement, sounds, etc.). Camp’s work, in form and subject matter, is heavily influenced by Kalabari traditions. Yet the artist, like Ringgold and Mosoke, demonstrates a distinctive personal vision that is recognizable in her individual style. Her representation of women is a particularly distinctive mark in contemporary African art, for unlike the prevailing stereotypical prototypes – ritualized puberty figure, mother, youthful beauty, etc. – Camp’s impressionistic representation of the female subject effectively evokes character, power and action (see her “Woman, part of Audience Ensemble,” 1986, steel and paint, 75.5”), a sign of the provocative imagination, skill, subjective knowledge and experience that give rise to the basic assumption of women’s differences in personalities and roles, as well as her desire to deploy those assumptions in her dominant themes. Camp’s work cannot be divorced either from her identity as a Kalabari woman or from the individual freedom with which she works as a contemporary sculptor. Her work and life stimulate both greater thought about the divergent identities of women artists of African descent – the
stylistic and thematic differences in our works of art, and the complexities scholars will encounter in developing the critical art history that must synthesize conventional and new art-historical methods – and also further investigation of the appropriate histories and cultures that will allow us to get beyond the mystification surrounding the artistic products of Black women in art history and art world practice.

Ringgold, Mosoke, and Camp are among the many Black women artists who produce convincing works of art with eloquence and integrity. Most of them remain unrecorded in the dominant discourses on art and largely unknown either to the professional art world or to the public audience, because of the controlling institutional biases of the art world and its canonized scholarly proclivities.

The persistence of these artists, African-American and African, is perhaps partially derived from the strength retained, reclaimed, and synthesized in cultural and ideological patterns extant in their various communities, factors to which they and many other Black artists had been exposed in their material conditions prior to, and during, their academic training. Paradoxically, the determinacy implicit in such influence inheres an expressive freedom leading to the kind of imaginative and dynamic works discussed, yet it is also weighted by the canon problematic in prevailing discourses that negates the artists’ importance to conventional and even postmodern art history and criticism.

Interestingly, some Black women artists observe that their “outsider” status in Eurocentric discourses, with its critical distance from the mainstream, stimulates a greater sense of independence and creative freedom. Piper finds joy and freedom in the margins, in the company of artists who are doing “much of the really advanced, exciting, [and] original work,” with a clear view of “the narrow range of aesthetic options validated by the mainstream” (Piper, 1990a: 12–13). Ringgold, too, emphasizes that since she is on the outside anyway, she can do what she wants.13 Sociologist Pat Hill Collins uses the term “outsider within” to identify this distanced marginal placement and the special viewpoint that some Black women say they acquire within the construct of Eurocentric exclusionism, and surmises that it provides “a special perspective on self, family and society” which contributes to “distinctive analyses” (Collins, 1991: 40). It is not surprising that the voices of the artist and sociologist interpenetrate in exposing the specific inclusion/exclusion dichotomy/advantage that is experienced by Black women within the contexts of systems dominated by the Euro-patriarchy.

Any interpretation of such remarks as acceptance of the given status would be naive. In any case, who is to say that a similar joy and freedom might not exist for the “outsider within” if she were positioned more centrally within the currents of the dominant art (or other) world/s with the full benefits of such placement? In the area of art in particular, Piper and Ringgold are among the many Black women artists who produce convincing works of art with eloquence and integrity. Most of them remain unrecorded in the dominant discourses on art and largely unknown either to the professional art world or to the public audience, because of the controlling institutional biases of the art world and its canonized scholarly proclivities.

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among the most vocal American women who continue to resist established boundaries in the art world that exclude people of color, especially women. Ringgold herself has for some 25 years addressed the interests and problems of Black and other women (and men) in various discourses, often articulating her own personal narrative to underscore the reality of Black women’s subjugated identities and experiences. She most recently commented, “Everything about my life has to do with the fact that I am a Black woman. The way I work has everything to do with that, because I am struggling against being a victim which is what Black women become in this society” (Flomenhaft, 1990: 14).

Sociologist Deborah King identifies the shared distinctive circumstances of Black women in general as the phenomenon of “multiple jeopardy,” a quality that she describes as socially constructed by the simultaneity and multiplicative relationships among their race, gender, and class, and to which she attributes a shared “multiple consciousness.”14 In support, sociologist Pat Hill Collins specifies that the commonalities among Black women are grounded in two major interlocking factors: (1) Black women’s “political and economic status that provide[d] them with a distinctive set of experiences” and (2) distinctive Black feminist consciousness stimulated by the experience derived from their material realities.15 Though their discussions refer specifically to the circumstances and awareness of Black women in the USA they are applicable to the shared realities of Black women artists globally, for, regardless of where they live, Black women artists inherit a common devalued (though different) status that has major adverse economic, political, and cultural implications for their lives and production.

Only the rare art historian, critic or theorist offers substantive interpretations of works and thoughts of Black women artists. Among them, art historian Leslie King-Hammond reconstructs empirical facts, the basis of art criticism,16 art history and theory, in her quest to make justifiable aesthetic judgments of the art objects and performances of Black women artists. King-Hammond stresses production over the victimization in her analyses, concluding that in spite of their material conditions, “these artists speak eloquently of the vision and presence of a people long overdue for inclusion in the art world of this country.” Based on the material evidence that I have seen in the USA, London, and various countries in Africa, I must add that Black women artists (and all people of color) throughout the world are long overdue for inclusion in art history and in the systematic operations of the global art world.17

With a self-activated and sustained discourse characterized by the knowledge and conviction of self-determination evident in the fragmented voices of Black women artists, art historians, and others, a major shift in the focus on Black women artists can be implemented. Most importantly, that shift
could transform defensive discussions to more insightful interpretative exchanges that would lead to the construction of a critical art history. In addition, more effective strategies for dismantling the exclusionary devices of the dominant art establishment could conceivably be constructed. Such objectives, in their entirety, could be identified as a Black feminist art project that would be both academic and political in character, its monumentality beyond my scope here. But it must begin with a distinctive discourse that would center Black women artists for such a discourse would circulate and debate facts, critiques, and theories while inscribing them into history.

...Black feminist theorizing to date has given minimal attention to art and where it has, the focus is on popular art and culture; i.e. film, video and music. Michele Wallace and bell hooks are the most prominent scholars, particularly in film criticism. Their theories intersect with the art writing of historians, curators, artists, and others who have given particular attention to visual and/or performing art by Black women.

Given the precedent that Black feminist theorizing has established in subjectivizing the thought and challenges of Black women, and given its analytical approach, it is evident that a discourse and critique that center the art of Black women artists would benefit tremendously from its perspective/s.

A Working Black Feminist Critique of the Visual Arts

The critique within the proposed Black feminist art-historical discourse would constitute a significant component of a critical art history. Because of the differences between art history and criticism, the former concerned with the reconstruction of the history of the art objects and the latter with an evaluative response to the art objects that are recovered by art history, the two disciplines are recognized as separate yet interrelated (Ackerman, 1963: 162). However, art historians necessarily make critical evaluation that goes beyond basic art-historical methods, and critics significantly contribute to the development of art history; hence the boundary is sometimes problematic. Within the proposed discourse, criticism must be developed along with Black women’s art history (African-American, British, Nigerian, etc.) since the latter is hardly known. Pre-eminent is the archeological recovery of buried art objects and lives, and the description and systematization of relevant empirical data both diachronically and synchronically. This project includes the discovery, description, and attribution of art works to artists and their particular historical periods among other problems. The fundamental task is to locate and organize a vast body of data for study, interpretation, and evaluation. Essentially, the significance of this beginning phase for Black women artists would mean the systematic recovery and historicizing of their work.
their work, little of which has been done to date. Most of what has been written lies within the history of African-American art, is secondary to male production, and for the most part is without critiques of class, gender and sexuality, though racial and aesthetic difference are traditionally considered in discussions of style, historical periods, and cultural and political movements.

Inextricably bound to the task of historicism is the formulation of analytical methods that would contribute to an understanding of the polyvalent production of Black women artists and to other scholarly/social interests of the Black feminist imagination/s. As art historian Michael Pondro expounds, the archeological question requires us to "provide answers on diverse matters of fact, on sources, patronage, purposes, techniques, contemporaneous responses and ideals"; while the critical history itself requires us to examine questions of sustained purposes and interests that are "both [irreducible] to the conditions of their emergence as well as [inextricable] from them" (Pondro, 1989: xviii). Hence a careful balance of formal and extra-formal investigations must constitute a significant element in the proposed critique. Analyses of form, iconography, and iconology, engaged in that critique, should consider integrally the simultaneity-multiplicative construct of race, class, gender, and sexuality, a consideration beyond conventional criticism which is largely formalist in its focus on the intrinsic qualities of the art object, though new art history and criticism both include and move beyond formalism (Flemming, 1991: 8).

Art educator Paulette Flemming criticizes the conventional art critics who "in vernacular and academic settings arbitrate meaning, significance, and value of art forms, stabilizing meaning or offering new insight into those forms with which they are familiar and explaining and evaluating those with which they are unfamiliar" (Flemming, 1991: 9). She calls attention to the inadequate perspectives in existing art criticism, attributing them to the lack of research and theory development in its fundamental teaching. Her critique of enthroned models of criticism in the educational system such as E. Feldman's "critical performance" (description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation) and H. S. Broudy's "aesthetic scanning" (discussions of sensory, formal, expressive, and technical qualities) and others (Flemming, 1991: 9) reveals the limitations of those approaches, as does her interrogation of criticism's claim of universality based on the belief that "the aesthetic experience, formal qualities of the art object, and pansocial human activities" are universally accessible (Flemming, 1991: 9). Flemming's rejection of the cultural elitism and legitimacy given to "certain artworlds" overlays that of Black feminist theory in general as does her reiteration of the need to recognize cultural difference and the subjective response to aesthetic experience; qualities in which art criticism must engage if it is to be pluralistically valid.
Functionalist and contextualist theories are important to the proposed Black feminist critique, though at present apt to show limitations with greater focus on extrinsic factors sometimes to the detriment of intrinsic and historical considerations. Africanists, for example, utilize functionalism and contextualism to concentrate on art and cultural phenomena, often focusing on a specific ethnic area wherein they give primary attention to ritual, audience and symbolism, and their collective significance. Historian/art historian Jan Vansina criticizes the limitation of this conventional anthropological ahistorical approach and calls for the inscription of a historical (diachronic) approach to the study of African art (Vansina, 1984).

Marxist archeological and critical scholarship, which overlaps the Africanist, is also useful to a Black feminist critique though its emphasis on the economic base of social history and its insistence on the instrumental value of art to society are somewhat problematic. The Marxist and functionalist/contextualist critiques of African art are especially relevant to those of cultural nationalists, particularly in regard to the latter's concern with the social value of Black aesthetics and the functions of art and artists in society; as the work and philosophy of the Afri-COBRA group demonstrate (Thorson, 1990: 26–31). An examination of selected social issues along with the examination of art objects contributes to understanding the dynamics of events and attitudes of historical periods in relation to the themes and styles of art objects, and the ideologies of artists. This means that investigations of art must include intrinsic and extrinsic analyses.

Feminist analyses in general are assumed to be fundamental to a Black feminist critique in that they raise questions of gender in formal, contextual, psychoanalytical or other critical approaches. Their interrogation of patriarchy, elitism and classism is especially useful; however, the assumed Europeanisms of British Marxist scholars that suppress or dismiss critical awareness of the art of people of African descent reveal their limitations. Some American feminist critiques also fail on the issue of race, others do ascribe to minimal inclusion with discussions of art by African-American women in the USA and/or the inclusion of essays by Black women art historians, critics, etc.

What is especially important about the various voices of contextualism and functionalism is a fundamental rejection of the formalist paradigm of modernist criticism that Roger Fry, Clive Bell, Clement Greenberg, and other critics dogmatically utilized, convinced that appreciation of the art object must rest on its intrinsic values, i.e. its "significant form" alone. Such rejection coalesces with the conventions of such African-American scholars as philosopher Alain Locke and art historians/artists James Porter, David Driskell, Samella Lewis, and Richard Powell, whose critical approaches synthesize formalism and contextualism from diverse perspectives to document and integrally interpret form, content, social and cultural meanings,
audiences and reception among other factors. African-Americanist approaches in the area of art history and criticism are most relevant to the proposed critique since their investigations engage material culture and social history that include the issue of race and more recently gender in the archaeological recovery of the lives and works of Black women and men.

Contextualism and functionalism, as Africanist anthropologist Warren d’Azevedo explains, alert us to the importance of understanding both the art object’s aesthetic qualities and the context in which it originates: “The significance of any object – its ‘form’ – can be ascertained only with reference to the esthetic values of the members of a given sociocultural system for whom it functions esthetically” (d’Azevedo, 1958: 702-14).

Black feminist art criticism must both utilize aspects of existing paradigms and introduce new ways of thinking about art as it inserts its distinctiveness in subjects and perspectives, to: (1) assert the visibility and production of Black women artists in the USA and in other areas of the African diaspora and Africa, uncovering and documenting their lives, works, and interventions in society; (2) reject any question of universal truth or beauty since its basic assumption is that art is interactive with the specific cultural values of the context in which it originates and to which it contributes; (3) recognize the importance of both the African continent and the European continent in the development of African-American art which, in fact, is American art; (4) reject the established hierarchy of materials extant in conventional art history, and alternatively recognize the diversity in the artistic production (fine art, crafts and popular) by academic and nonacademic artists and assume that each has to be evaluated in terms of its particular form, function and value to its audience/s; (5) examine representation, particularly in regard to the history and politics of race, gender, class, and sexuality; (6) speak across the boundaries of race, class, gender, sexuality, age and discipline, to be enriched by and to enrich existing knowledge; (7) remain open to utilizing aspects of conventional methods (style-iconography-iconology) and revised approaches (influenced by literary criticism, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and interrelated political movements) while exploring new ways to inscribe and critique a yet to be written critical history of art of Black women artists.

Given its anticipated performative function, a Black feminist critique would resist the basic assumptions in the canons of art history that identify artists as “great”/inspired “geniuses” and their art as “masterpieces”, an idea highly influenced by Florentine culture and derived from the ideals of ancient Greek models (Vasari, 1987: vii). Its interrogation of the canon would recognize that the current exclusionary art world practices are based on judgments derived from Eurocentric art-historical knowledge, particularly that developed during the Italian Renaissance with artist/art historian
Giorgio Vasari’s publication, *Le Vite de’più eccellenti Pittori, Scultori e Architettori Italiani* [Lives of the most excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects]; dated 1550 and expanded 1568. Because of its official standardization of the discipline of art history, Vasari’s *Lives* has been identified as “perhaps the most important book on the history of art ever written” (Osborne, 1987: 1177). Art historian Hans Belting observes that Renaissance art historiography “erected a canon of values, and in particular a standard of ideal or classic beauty,” a norm of historical progress toward “a universal classicism, against which all other epochs are to be measured” (Belting, 1987: 8). In her resistant reading art historian Nannette Solomon surmises, “Vasari introduced a structure or discursive form that, in its incessant repetition, produced and perpetuated the dominance of a particular gender, class, and race as the purveyors of an art and culture” (Solomon, 1992: 223). A Black feminist critique would reject the preeminence and persistence of that influence and its adverse impact on art history texts, university curricula and museums throughout the world, and especially in art world practices that enthrone art/artifacts of European cultures while devaluing those of people of color (see Lewis, 1982: 42).

Art historian John Tagg reminds us that any adequate critique of art history must critique not only its paradigm of art, but also its “repertoire of legitimate objects with which art histories have engaged,” since art history “operates with and defends a given definition of its object of knowledge, while limiting the permissible methods for constructing and establishing such knowledge” (Tagg, 1992: 42–3). African-Americanists and Eurofeminists have already legitimated their own forms in their publications, museums, galleries, exhibitions and other networks, but Black women artists have minimally benefited from these developments. Ultimately, the concept “canon” has to be challenged with the question “Whose canon?” By recognizing canonicity within constructs of its particular culture, whether Italian Renaissance or Yoruba antiquities, the critical art historian must reject universalizing tendencies, and work toward constructing analyses based on informed judgments that are validated by cultural grounding.

Material cultural theory would be particularly useful here for it raises many questions beyond conventional approaches that would allow the incorporation of vernacular forms into art history. Jules D. Prown informs us that material culture refers to manmade artifacts as well as to the study of beliefs through artifacts, of “values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions – of a particular community or society at a given time” (Prown, 1982: 1–18). The inclusion of vernacular forms by pioneer African-American James Porter set the precedent for considering crafts with fine arts. An understanding of vernacular forms is highly significant to the development of a critical art history of African-American art for pottery, basketry, quiltmaking and others.
provide primary evidence of historical, material and aesthetic links to the history of African-American fine arts in the USA, and links to the past/African heritage; i.e. African art, aesthetics and cultural elements that entered the country with enslaved Africans during forced migration and slavery. Material culture as discussed by John Vlach, Robert Thompson and others offers some direction for the proposed critique; however, they fail short of gender analyses though women’s material production is included. We must go beyond mere inclusion.

Given the precedent in African-American art history surveys to include both “fine art” and “folk art” and the interrelated qualities of the two, the proposed critical art history must carefully inscribe both and show how they contribute to the overall picture, but with greater depth. It would resist the problematic assumption of a hierarchy in materials, recognizing that the life and work of nineteenth-century Harriet Powers (1837–1911), an enslaved and later “freed” quilter of Athens, Georgia, are as important for investigation as those of Edmonia Lewis (c. 1845–c. 1911), a “free” woman of color who produced marble sculpture in the neo-classical tradition during the same period. Both artists significantly participated in the shaping of the history of African-American art and both interacted within their various contexts to make an imprint that merits attention. Powers is often excluded and Lewis often included in Euro-feminist and African-American art-historical scholarship, though brief discussion of quilting and other craft traditions occurs; but Powers is included and Lewis excluded in the work of material culturalists. A Black feminist critique must carefully review the data of both, and of those who produce on either side of the “fine art”/“craft” boundary, in order to reconstruct the proposed critical art history.

The craft tradition is significant material evidence of woman’s personal expression, aesthetic taste, productive labor, and intervention in her given social structure. Crafted forms constitute a functional body of work that was and remains interactive with fine arts in the larger scheme of development in African-American women’s art history and often signify a Black woman’s difference in artistic production, raising the debate of essentialism and constructionism. Regardless of the stance there taken, a distinct expressiveness in quiltmaking forms by Black women has become well known through the scholarship of Maude Wahlman, John Vlach, Reginia Perry, Eli Leon, and others. Specific identifiable qualities in quiltmaking traditions and other African-American folk art forms are derived from conventional aesthetic values within the communities wherein those works are produced and whose aesthetic and moral values they, in turn, influence. Vernacular values are diffused with the migration of African-Americans (including fine artists), for Black women took their traditional skills with them and generally passed them on to their daughters.
But simply inscribing folk, fine art, and popular art by Black women artists is not enough to justify the uniqueness of a Black feminist critique. Here the multiplicative-simultaneity factor of race, gender, class, and sexuality requires specific attention, in regard to Black women's work, the works of others and many critical issues.

A brief contextual consideration of nineteenth-century artists Harriet Powers and Edmonia Lewis will exemplify the potential instrumental value of a Black feminist critique in the production of a critical art history.

Lewis was Northern, "free" (not enslaved), college-educated, "privileged" (access to limited economic and patriarchal power) and single (free of man and child); Powers was enslaved and later emancipated, "uneducated," without privilege (money and power), married and with children. Lewis was born possibly in New York, possibly in Greenhigh, Ohio; attended Oberlin College and later made her mark in art history, after expatriating to Rome in 1865; she is believed to have died there c. 1911. Powers, on the other hand, lived and died in Georgia. Little is known about her life or travel, except that she and her husband were landowners and that she was able to care for herself after his departure, perhaps through her farm animals and sewing abilities (Fry, 1990: 84–91). The works of both artists are preserved in major museum collections, though only two of Powers's are known; but Powers's works were powerful enough to launch her into posterity. Powers's quilts are, in fact, canonical works: they link African-American quilting traditions to African textile traditions (West and Central), though often compared specifically with the Fon appliqué of the Republic of Benin. One quilt consists of 15 rectangular and square motifs arranged in strip design, each framing human, animal, or astronomical silhouettes in high-contrast colors. The pictorial character that combines imagery from biblical, local history and social commentary is linked to the Fon appliqué in its structure, technique, and narrative function. Its formal rhythmical style, combining both structured organization and improvisational qualities, reveals a dynamically controlled horizontal composition with limited color scheme, dominated by warm tonalities, though dramatically activated by its high-contrast design. Art historian Gladys-Marie Fry notes that Powers's "fascination with biblical animals and characters probably stemmed from hearing vivid sermons in church on Sundays" and that the core of Powers's religious imagery invoked biblical figures who "struggled successfully against overwhelming odds" (Fry, 1990: 84–5). Could this work perhaps be seen as a composition that expressed the artist's personal view of life, a view related to her desire to intervene in her contexts to present aesthetic beauty that articulated her particular sociopolitical stance? Is it possible to interpret the selection of particular empowered imagery, consonant with prevailing African-American religious-political metaphors of her period, as a practice
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expressive of her own individuality and shared "cultural memory" and material conditions? Representation of religious genre and historical events suggests this possibility. The Bible quilt is of special interest in this regard. How might such imagery be interpreted in light of Powers's low economic status, strong religious beliefs, and her victimization by slavery, racism, and patriarchy? Such thoughts would be invoked and investigated in a Black feminist critique.

The question of subject-matter in Lewis’s work is also important in addition to form and context. Hagar, for example, though different in materials and style from Powers's biblical imagery, faced tremendous odds as the Egyptian maid servant of Hebrew Sarah, wife of Abraham. Renita Weems calls attention to Hagar's symbolism; slave woman, powerless, reproductive/exploited/manipulated body, unprotected, cast out into the desert with her son/Abraham’s son; a story of victimization. Yet Lewis, daughter of a Chippewa mother (who remained in her environment and maintained her lifestyle) and an African-American butler father, rendered Hagar in an ennobled dramatic gesture, subverting the oppressive imagery of Hagar and in a sense of oppressed people of color, as did other African-American women such as educator Anna Julia Cooper (1858–1964), who "authored the first Black feminist analysis of the condition of Blacks and women" (Guy-Sheftall, 1990: 25). Lewis’s works intervened in public spaces in exhibitions to assert the dignified representation of Black, Native American and biblical figures, displaying a resonance that radically expanded conventions of her neo-classical style beyond Greek influence. Her sculpted marble forms, characteristically ennobling Black and Native American subjects in gesture and overall effect with a characteristic dramatic grandeur, were oppositional to prevailing degrading representations of Black people in the popular Euro-patriarchist media that proliferated during her period (Lemons, 1977: 102–16). They also differed from the hierarchically encoded and delimited representations of Black subjects by fine artists of European descent. In referring to Hagar (1875), Lewis noted that the subject-matter was inspired by her “strong sympathy for all women who have struggled and suffered” (Hartigan, 1985: 94). The empowered presentment of the form immediately calls to mind the strong female biblical characters of African-American orators and educators who synthesized religious beliefs and political resistance. Though her work adheres to the European canon, some of her subject-matter and its iconography emerge from specific lived experience, social conditions and interpretations interactive with those experiences and conditions.

The form and meaning in the works of Powers and Lewis reveal that the artists intervened in their contexts with their own particular Black feminist or womanist voice and drew upon shared cultural and social attitudes not unrelated to their shared racial identities. Their materials are related to the
class and opportunities available to each, while their esthetic effect is related
to the qualities that most appealed to their individual sensitivities. Meaning
and associative values in the two works substantiate the point that “low”
craft and “high” fine art traditions in the history of African-American art
interpenetrate each other and are both essential to the critical art history of
Black women’s art.

Unlike Powers, who apparently “stayed put” as wife and mother, and
unlike Black women of the intelligentsia, Cooper and Maria Stewart, who
grounded themselves in the ideals of the “Cult of True Womanhood” of the
nineteenth century as they fought for the rights of Black women and men,
Lewis chose to bypass such ideals and, independent of children, men and the
“Cult”, became a member of the “White, Marmorean Flock” of American
women sculptors in Rome (Thorpe, 1959), where she reportedly exhibited
her “strong-mindedness” (Hartigan, 1985: 94) though tenuously regarded
as an “exotic” other.

By reviewing the imprint of these important nineteenth-century figures,
one can resist the canonical debate of high vs. low art and begin to think with
greater depth about the importance of fine art and craft to African-American
life and history and to the construction of a critical art history that centers
the lives and production of Black women artists.

The question that art historian Linda Nochlin asked in 1971, “Why Have
there Been No Great Women Artists?” (1971: 32) assumes that greatness is defined by
the ideology of the speaker and his/her constituency, and therefore remains
problematic. A Black feminist critique would instead ask who were/are Black
women artists; what styles, subject-matter, and meanings did they produce in
their various forms; how did their specific circumstances contribute to or
restrict their production; how did those works intervene in the society of
which they were a part; what was their particular reception; where, by whom,
and why? Questions pertaining to Black women’s simultaneous production
of art/reproduction (children) roles and those addressing woman-identified
women must be integrally explored. Simultaneously it must debunk histori-
cal racist theories that promoted “Negro” inferiority with articulations
that declared the “Negro’s inability to produce art though having a ‘natural
talent for music’” (Fredrickson, 1971: 105), theories fundamental to the
current exclusionism extant in the art world today for they reinforce the
stereotyped idea that while African-Americans might appear to appreciate the
visual art, they were/are “manifestly unable to produce it” (Hartigan, 1985:
73). Such myths cannot be ignored though they cannot be the focus of
discussion in a Black feminist critique.

As Black women artists speak and work throughout the country today,
they reveal cultural and political commonalities that are coextensive with
their shared histories and material conditions, though their differences are
apparent in styles, mediums, subject-matter, the ways the body is invoked, the
ways in which the body is synthesized in the image, the ways in which the
immediate context defines the person, the women, and beyond the person,
the way in which the images themselves define the persons, the women, to them as a whole. How can the contexts that link the
USA, past and present, with the artists’ lives and the larger art world be
inscribed on Black women’s art, and how can the art be drawn into the
construction of a new’s art world that takes these contexts, histories, and
intersections into account.

1. Art historians have for years, have consistently, have always...
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apparent in the individuality of their personalities and vision. Their different styles, media, themes, reputations and professional roles display a heterogeneous body of work that ranges from abstract formalized structures meant to invoke mere aesthetic contemplation, to evocative performance pieces which synthesize aesthetic and extra-aesthetic qualities that are intended to activate immediate political responses from the spectator. No monolithic definition defines their style, though there is often some reference to their identities, and beyond the work itself, a commonality in the race and gender of those identities; also class and sexuality though perhaps more variable. It is their identity, in fact, that situates them outside of dominant art history and at the periphery of the art establishment. Those locations and the artists’ response to them are coextensive with their collective history, culture and ideologies that link them to each other and to other African-American women in the USA, past and present. To engage these various aspects of Black women artists’ lives and works is the challenge of a Black feminist critique and the larger art-historical discourse. Until that particular discourse is constructed, Black women artists and their production will remain behind the veil of art history. But as we collectively activate our knowledge and power, we can enframe new discourses on art wherein we can locate our histories and construct critiques that will appropriately inscribe our lives, production, and interventions in this world.

Notes

1 Art history is a discipline that regulates the scholarly investigation of selected works of art and the historical evidence pertaining to them. The discipline systematically focuses on the fine art and lives of men of European descent. It chronicles developments of works of art (primarily painting, sculpture, and architecture) by styles and periods, giving attention to form (structure), iconography (meaning), iconology (subject-matter, meaning, and cultural attitudes), biography and historical contexts among other concerns. Its conventional purpose is to provide knowledge about developments of “major works” “masterpieces” by “major figures” “giennises” and ultimately to influence appreciation of them. Despite much debate over the past 20 years about its racial and gender biases, little has been done to alter the exclusion of people of color in the basic texts, professional journals, museum practices, etc. The art of African-Americans and various people of color (excluding forms of Africa often designated as “primitive”) remain virtually excluded. The past decade, however, has seen an increasing number of exhibitions of the art of people of color, an influence perhaps of the rhetoric of multiculturalism, but group exhibitions are disproportionately male and the solo exhibition is invariably a “one man show”. Criticism is integrally related to art history, though it produces evaluative responses to art objects. Such responses are
grounded in the art-historical knowledge and cultural values/biases/subjectivities of the critics who are, by and large, Eurocentric in their orientation.

2 The patriarchy of men of European descent that regulates the art world operates a hierarchical system that asserts Euro-male superiority and domination over everyone else and the value of Euro-male production over that of others. In referring to the networking powers of Euro-male dominance, Elizabeth Grosz identifies three terms in particular that she says are not mutually exclusive: (1) sexism – an empirical phenomenon wherein women are treated as unequal to men; (2) patriarchy – a structure that “systematically evaluates masculinity in positive and femininity in negative terms”; (3) phallo-centricism – two types, the first being modes of representation that reduce differences to a common denominator of masculinity, and the second a process of hierarchization wherein one sex is judged as better than its counterpart (Grosz, 1990: 152). See Royland and Klein, 1990: 277. The noted terms and definitions identify the character and operation of the dominant art world.

3 *Artwriting* is the term used by David Carrier (1991: introduction) to refer to texts by art historians and art critics.

4 The term *art world* generally refers to “universes of regularized responses” that “coalesce around the production, creation, distribution, and evaluation of various” art works. See Vlach and Bronner, 1986: 1–10. The dominant art world (Euro-patriarchy) places emphasis on fine art, setting and regulating standards according to the particular interests of its controllers. Vlach and Bronner call attention to the networks of folk art and utilize the term *folk art worlds* to designate different aspects of the larger network that is yet another component of the overall multilayered system of art. The term *art worlds* is appropriate since there are others beside the dominant one; i.e. African-American, Euro-feminist, Africanist, Chicano/a, etc. Each of the structures, developed because of specific interest, claims and promotes the art of specific heritage/s as they interpenetrate the dominant art world, while resisting devaluation and exclusion from museum and gallery spaces. I will use “art world” or “dominant art establishment” to refer to the ruling fine art world of the Euro-patriarchy.

5 See: Bontemps and Bontemps (1980); Driskell (1976); Jones (1990); Lewis, (1990); Sims (1990); Vlach (1990).

6 Many Black women artists have articulated the problems that they encounter in the “art world”, concurring that those problems are often related to race, gender, and difference in aesthetic taste. See Piper, (1990b: 15–20).

7 Piper identifies specific comments made by Euro-American critics to illustrate Eurocentric biases, generalizations, and impositions on African-American artists (often masked by utterances citing undefined notions of quality): Rosalind Krauss “doubts that there is any unrecognized African-American art of quality because if it doesn’t bring itself to her attention, it probably doesn’t exist”; Roberta Smith notes “that the real problem with the art of African-Americans is that it just isn’t any good, that it would be in the mainstream galleries if it were, that she’s been up to The Studio Museum in Harlem a couple of times and hasn’t seen anything worthwhile, that it’s all too derivative”; Hilton Kramer protests “the current interest in African-American art...” (Piper, 1990b: 15–20). Euro-centricity and Euro-values in art criticism and art world’s judgment are given further depth in a recent article by Beverly Guy Shearin, “African-American artists and the Eurocentric art world.”

8 See: Bontemps and Bontemps (1980); Driskell (1976); Jones (1990); Lewis, (1990); Sims (1990); Vlach (1990).

9 See T. D. Miller (1971: 31–32) for an example of Euro-centricity (deriving from ‘etymology’) in art criticism. Miller notes that African art is functional art which does not manifest the same “wildness” that Black art does, and that this duality in Black art is due to the African body.

10 See T. D. Miller (1986: 36) where she explains: “African art does not belong to the history of the Western world...”

11 Tesfagiorgis, 1990: 170–171, where she suggests that her feminist stance might be supported by the literature written on Black women artists by mainstream museums.

12 Doubtless, this is not a definitive list, but I have included it to consider that in many circumstances the quality of African art is not given its proper status in the art world. But why not? Because the gender, race, and national group are different?

13 In discussions of her past relationships as an art critic, her many contemporaries, and her own interest in feminist, African-American art, Piper notes: “I’ve been up to The Studio Museum in Harlem a couple of times and haven’t seen anything worthwhile, that it’s all too derivative”; Hilton Kramer protests “the current interest in African-American art...”
interest in issues of race and gender that, he claims, leave quality by the wayside” (Piper, 1990b: 15–17). Such remarks are representative of the prevailing Eurocentric proclivities with which Black women, men, and all people of color must contend; one has to question and critically interrogate uniformed/uneducated judgments by individuals who merely observe isolated objects with no historical depth. They reinforce the ongoing devaluation of Afro-American art from the beginning of an art history which is grounded in the cultural hegemony of Eurocentrism. The noted statements of the postmodernist era are, in fact, no different from the negative Eurocentric critiques of modernism. We all remember Hilton Kramer from the 1960s with his hostilities toward Black art.

8 See: Flomenhaft (1990); Tesfagiorgis (1987a; reprinted in Garrard and Boude, 1992); Wallace (1984).

9 See Tesfagiorgis (1987a), for more in-depth discussion of Ringgold’s work. On African-American art and culture, see Powell (1989) and Thompson (1983). For example, Thompson discusses the multiple meter in African-American music (derived from traditional African music) and the emphatic multistrip composition in African-American textiles (derived from textile traditions in various regions in Africa). Mauldsby (1990) extends her discussion of the interplay of aesthetics and function in African-American and African music to include the visuality of performance and calls attention to the “array of colors and fashions seen in concert halls, Black churches, and other Black performance sites” as well as the dynamics of body language and other visual qualities that she links to African traditions.

10 See Tesfagiorgis (1989); an interview with Therese Moseke, in Nairobi, Kenya where Moseke lives.

11 Tesfagiorgis (1987b): an interview with Sokari Douglas Camp, in London, UK, where Camp lives. I had the opportunity to interview Sokari Douglas Camp in her London studio where I also viewed her work and acquired minimal understanding of her conceptualizations and processes. (This research trip was funded by the University of Wisconsin Graduate School.) Later I was able to interact with her works in a formal display at her one-woman exhibition at the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian (November 11, 1988–January 29, 1989).

12 Douglas briefly studied woodcarving with the neo-traditionalist Lamidi Fakaye, defying gender boundaries since woodcarving in Nigeria and other African countries is conventionally a male profession. She also briefly studied a powerful Kalabari priestess, Amonia Horsfall. Such opportunities were related to her Kalabari, Nigeria identity, academic training and somewhat outsider status given that she has lived in London much of her life though also in her hometown periodically.

13 In discussing the freedom that she feels by recognizing her “outsider” relationship to the dominant art world, particularly to the “tastemakers,” Ringgold indicates that such a position negates their influence because “she is not a member of those groups who would profit from being on the cutting edge.” “I’m not a man and I’m not white. So I can do what I want and that has been my greatest gift. It’s kind of a backhanded gift, but it sets me free,” she insists. See Flomenhaft (1990: 15).
14 This concept expands sociologist Frances Beale’s concept of “double jeopardy, double consciousness” that referred to the racism and sexism experienced by Black women. See King (1988).

15 Collins (1989). Not all Black women artists claim a Black feminist consciousness; in fact some disclaim it. The same is true of Black women in general. Other nomenclatures have been imposed to identify the assertive stance taken by Black women both to enact self-determination and to resist oppression; i.e. the term womanist was proposed by Alice Walker and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, etc. Afrocentrism, which I proposed as an either/or term for Black feminism, was rejected by theorist Molefi Asante (in discussions at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, December, 1991) because he viewed Afrocentrism as an ideology that encompassed the stance of men and women; though he did note that gender differences were being discussed at Temple University where he was chair of the Department of Afro-American Studies at the time. I will use Black feminism, the prevailing term used to identify the currents of Black women’s critical social engagement at various levels, as I continue to rethink Afrocentrism. However, the various terms are not fixed, and regardless of what, if any, we settle on, what matters is that Black women are articulating their empowerment in oral and written form while actively asserting their thoughts and actions to transform society.


17 In an exhibition catalogue, King-Hammond and Sims (1989: Introduction) discuss the works of the 13 exhibited multi-media artists, 11 of them Black women and two Black men. The text’s illuminating and insightful interpretations offer a minuscule view of the wealth of art by Black women and men that remains largely hidden in the gaps of Eurocentric art history, criticism, and the larger art world.

18 Pondro (1989). Pondro uses the term critical art history to signify artwriting that includes art history and art criticism.

19 Michele Wallace’s work is particularly insightful in this regard, especially her film criticism. Wallace makes it clear, for example, that as Black male film-makers join the workforce of Hollywood, their production also joins the existing practice of exploiting the images of Black women. The shift of authority from White to Black male producer/speaker extends the tradition of locating Black women into negative imagery that reduces them to passive, sexualized objects of various types. See Wallace (1990).


29 This discussion is based on conversations with Abigail, A. J. in 1985.


tends, however, to be on popular and folk art, though Wallace does include fine art. Black women art historians, curators, and artists are significantly contributing to the recovery and reinscribing of the lives, works and interventions of Black women artists. Our task, however, has hardly begun.

22 Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin (1976) definitely fail.
23 Chatwick (1990); Garrard and Boude (1992); Raven et al. (1988).
24 Greenberg (1965); Chipp (1975).

26 Vernacular principles and such elements as color scheme (generally warm and high contrast), polyrhythms, strip design, and others have been defined and linked to specific qualities in various locations of Africa. See: Vlach (1990) Thompson (1983); Ferris (1983); University Art Museum, University of Southwestern Louisiana, *Baking in the Sun: Visionary Images from the South*, Lafayette, LA, 1987; Wardlaw et al. (1989); Tesfagorgis (1992): 28–37, 39.

27 Above texts reveal this pattern. Also see: Kunene-Pointer (1985).
28 See Boime (1990); Fredrickson (1971); McElroy et al. (1990).
29 This is a vital essay in feminist art history which was first published in 1971 and has been reprinted in Nochlin (1988).

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Somewhere in the background while this essay has been going on, the historical text has run through 50 years, when they serve the supposed needs of History, after all, has pointed out that and “different” and “control of water” is something that there is a “right” of the moment occasion and somehow causally – as “minority”

Taking a closer look, it may not be surprising, given though more certain, that we believe that it is with increasing abstractly abstracted it has to be so. In this sense, Clarissa Britons Zan and Zan, one of the minority photographers with each...